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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: RUSSIAN DELEGATION PROMOTES DEFENSE TIES AND "MULTIPOLARITY" IN LEAD-UP TO CFK VISIT TO RUSSIA

REF: BUENOS AIRES 1442

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Argentine Defense Minister Nilda Garre hosted the Secretary of Russia's National Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, on October 15, entertaining Russian proposals for military sales, training, and non-military cooperation including in the field of nuclear energy. Although potential military sales and commercial ties received significant press attention, the central theme emphasized by the Russian delegation was that Russia and Argentina share, according to Patrushev, "a multipolar vision" and that Russia seeks enhanced ties with partners in Latin America. The Russian Delegation also expressed interest in an observer role at the newly-forming Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). An Argentine MOD spokesman announced that Russia had offered flexible financing for a discussed sale of heavy helicopters suitable for use in Antarctica, where Argentina maintains scientific bases (managed by the military) and a territorial claim. GOA officials have told us that purchases of helicopters and nuclear technology are currently not in the budget, but MOD Garre's public commitment to prepare for a successful visit by President Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) to Russia in December suggests that politics and diplomacy might overcome budget shortcomings. We have even heard one rumor of a multi-year barter arrangement to cover an MI 17 helicopter purchase. End Summary.

¶2. (U) A delegation headed by Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian National Security Council, visited Argentina on October 15, during a three-nation South American tour. Russian Ambassador to Argentina Yuri Korchagin stressed Patrushev's high station in the Russian foreign policy hierarchy, describing him as a "man of Vladimir Putin's trust." Patrushev met with Minister of Defense Nilda Garre and also with Foreign Minister Jorge Taiana and Cabinet Chief Sergio Massa. Press coverage of the visit focused on potential military sales but also on the visit's function as a challenge to alleged U.S. hemispheric hegemony. Writing in daily paper Clarin on October 18, columnist Raul Cardoso described the Russian message as "we are back" on the international power map.

¶3. (U) Official communications from the MOD-Patrushev consultations focused on the geopolitical issues and on possible areas of cooperation between the two countries. On the former, Patrushev said that the talks "affirmed that both countries share a multipolar vision of the world" and that there were no "contradictions" in the bilateral relationship. In an October 20 interview with daily Ambito Financiero, Ambassador Korchagin put heavy emphasis on Russia's readiness to partner with Latin America, a region with which it shared perspectives and had "never had any conflict," and a region that would be important in the emergent multipolar world.

Korchagin said that Russia was considering an invitation to be an observer at the Argentina-based Latin American Association of Peacekeeping Centers (ALCOPAZ), where the United States is also an observer. The Russian delegation had expressed an interest as well in observing UNASUR, something that Korchagin repeated while noting that this was not a formal request given that UNASUR was still being created and defined.

¶ 14. (SBU) In a separate conversation, the Russian Ambassador told Ambassador Wayne that commercial issues had been a big part of the Argentine Foreign Minister's late September visit to Moscow. He said the Russians are buying much more fruit from Argentines but that some shipments have had very high pesticide levels. The Foreign Minister agreed on a system for Russian food safety inspections in the context of rapidly rising Argentine sales to Russia.

¶ 15. (U) In terms of Russian sales, an Argentine defense ministry spokesman described Argentina's interest in obtaining heavy helicopters that could operate well in the harsh climate of Antarctica. He said that the Russian delegation had offered flexible financing for a potential sale of helicopters as well as training in space flight for Argentines. Korchagin confirmed that the Russians were interested in selling the Mi-17 helicopter to Argentina but emphasized this was not an aggressive expansion into Latin America given that Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia had already purchased them. Other areas of potential cooperation announced by the delegations included energy development and offshore hydrocarbons exploration, nuclear energy development, nanotechnology, counter-drug cooperation, and space exploration. Commentators noted that some of these

were traditionally areas of U.S. leadership (and some, including nanotechnology, are in fact on the agenda for U.S.-Argentina Bilateral Consultations).

¶ 16. (U) Minister of Defense Nilda Garre described herself as pleased with the visit. The two delegations agreed that specialists from both Ministries would meet November 4 in Buenos Aires in preparation for the first meeting of a bilateral Mixed Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation, to be held November 17 and 18 of the month. The commission was established under an MOU signed by Minister Garre in Moscow in 2006.

¶ 17. (SBU) During October 16 consultations with U.S. Ambassador to UN Institutions in Vienna Greg Schulte, the MFA's Director for International Security, Nuclear and Space Affairs Elsa Kelly addressed prospects for a Russian nuclear reactor construction in Argentina, noting that the country's budget had been strained by efforts to complete a current reactor long under construction. The next project was to be a Canadian model reactor, after which, she said, it was possible that a Russian reactor might be considered. She implied that this was a long way off. The MOD is also without a budget for new heavy helicopters. One mid-level MOD official involved in the Russian talks told PolMil Officer October 21 "we shall see" about the purchase but said that the current 2009 budget did not have funding for this type of helicopter. The Turkish Ambassador to Argentina told Ambassador Wayne last weekend with some confidence that there was an agreement whereby Argentina would purchase fifteen military helicopters capable of use in ground attack operations in exchange for wheat, apples, and honey provided over fourteen years, but we are not aware of how the financing of such a deal would work.

¶ 18. (SBU) The Argentines are seen as trying to curry favor with Russia in the run-up to CFK's visit to Moscow. The Ukrainian Ambassador complained bitterly to Ambassador Wayne that Argentina completely reversed its promise to support a Ukrainian-sponsored UN resolution in this year's UNGA about a massacre of Ukrainians during WWII. Not only did they not vote for it, they voted against it at the request of Russia, he said. The Ukrainian expressed gratitude for U.S. support of the resolution and said he had tried to mobilize the local

Ukrainian community to pressure the government, but he said he was not optimistic given the GOA desire to make the President's visit to Russia a success.

¶ 9. (SBU) Comment: The Russian visit generated significant attention here, and in their heavy emphasis on multipolarity the Russians did clearly invite interpretations of their activity as a counterweight to the U.S. role in the hemisphere. Given President Kirchner's upcoming visit to Moscow, we anticipate more plans, pronouncements, and even potentially some new substance in Russian-Argentine mil-mil cooperation. That said, the Argentine defense budget remains a sharply limiting factor that will constrain the scope of collaboration, though the government's decision to nationalize private pension funds could effect that (reftel).

WAYNE